

EMPLOYEE RECOGNITION AND AWARDS

- 1. REASON FOR ISSUE:** To revise Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) procedures regarding annual step rate reviews for facility directors, chiefs of staff, and nurse executives.
- 2. SUMMARY OF CONTENTS/MAJOR CHANGES:** This handbook contains mandatory VA procedures on employee recognition and awards. The pages in this issuance replace the corresponding page numbers in part V of VA Handbook 5017. This revision reflects the elimination of the annual step rate review process for facility directors, chiefs of staff, nurse executives, and chiefs of pharmacy service as a result of implementation of the Executive Career Field. These changes will be incorporated into the electronic version of VA Handbook 5007 that is maintained on [the Office of Human Resources Management Web site](#).
- 3. RESPONSIBLE OFFICE:** The Human Resources Management Programs and Policies Service (051), Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Human Resources Management.
- 4. RELATED DIRECTIVE:** VA Directive 5017, "Employee Recognition and Awards."
- 5. RESCISSIONS:** None.

CERTIFIED BY:

/s/

Edward F. Meagher
Acting Assistant Secretary for
Information and Technology

**BY DIRECTION OF THE SECRETARY
OF VETERANS AFFAIRS:**

/s/

William H. Campbell
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PART V. TITLE 38 SPECIAL ADVANCEMENTS AND CASH AWARDS

1. SCOPE. This part contains policies, procedures, and guidelines governing the advancement of physicians, dentists, podiatrists, optometrists, registered nurses, nurse anesthetists, physician assistants, and expanded-function dental auxiliaries appointed under authority of 38 U.S.C. 7401(1) or 7405(a); pharmacists, physical therapists, occupational therapists, certified respiratory therapists, registered respiratory therapists, and licensed practical or vocational nurses appointed under authority of 38 U.S.C. 7401(3) or 7405(a). Excluded are [] medical and dental residents appointed under authority of 38 U.S.C. 7406, and health care executives appointed under 38 U.S.C. 7306.

2. REFERENCES

- a. 38 U.S.C., chapters 73 and 74
- b. VA Directive 5017

3. PERSONS AUTHORIZED TO APPROVE ADVANCEMENTS. The Under Secretary for Health, or a designee, shall approve all advancements of employees covered by this part. (See appendix A of this part.)

4. CRITERIA FOR SPECIAL ADVANCEMENT FOR ACHIEVEMENT (SAA)

a. **Physicians and Dentists.** Full-time, part-time, and intermittent physicians and dentists may be advanced within the grade from one to five steps **on the basis of professional achievement above that expected for the grade level or assignment providing they have demonstrated a high level of performance and potential for assumption of greater responsibility.** Such achievement may be demonstrated by professional attainments in health care management, education, research, or patient care worthy of national or international recognition.

b. **Podiatrists and Optometrists.** Full-time, part-time, and intermittent podiatrist and optometrists may be advanced within the grade from one to five steps **on the basis of professional achievement above that expected for the grade level or assignment providing they have demonstrated a high level of performance and potential for assumption of greater responsibility.** Examples of professional achievement are:

- (1) Outstanding and exceptional achievement as evidenced by receipt of official recognition from a recognized professional or academic organization.
- (2) Significant professional attainment in research or contributions to podiatric or optometric science and patient care worthy of publication in a national or international journal of high regard within the respective professions.

a. **Consideration.** Full-time, part-time, and intermittent physicians [], dentists, podiatrists and optometrists in Executive grade and below and registered nurses [], nurse anesthetists, physician assistants, and expanded-function dental auxiliaries who have demonstrated a sustained high level of performance and professional competence over and above that normally expected of employees in the particular grade and profession, or who have made noted contributions in some phase of their profession, may be considered for Special Advancements for Performance (SAP). Pharmacists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, certified respiratory therapists, registered respiratory therapists, and licensed practical or vocational nurses may be considered in accordance with paragraph f below.

b. **Physicians, Dentists, Podiatrists and Optometrists.** An advancement of three steps, not to exceed the maximum of the grade, may be granted in lieu of and on the same due date established for a periodic step increase. Two steps may be granted when the employee is at the eighth step of the grade. The employee must have demonstrated a sustained high level of performance as evidenced by the following examples:

(1) Demonstration of exceptional skills and aptitudes in the care and treatment of patients.

(2) Actual assumption of greater professional and/or administrative responsibility. Faculty appointment (post residency) at the rank of instructor or above may be considered as a greater responsibility.

(3) Significant research.

(4) Significant clinical contribution (including publication).

c. **Registered Nurses and Nurse Anesthetists.** An advancement of one step within the grade may be granted to covered employees when there has been a demonstrated sustained high level of performance and ability over and above that normally expected of employees in the particular grade and profession. In addition, one or more of the criteria listed in chapter 4, paragraph 6 of part III of VA Handbook 5005, Staffing, must be met.

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d. **Physician Assistants.** The employee must have demonstrated a sustained high level of performance and ability over and above that normally expected of employees in the particular grade and profession or there must have been noted contributions in some aspect of health care. Criteria for one-step advancement will be demonstrated superior performance as evidenced by:

(1) Assumption of a major responsibility in administering a major patient care program.

(2) Significant accomplishments associated with an academic program conducted in affiliation with the facility where the physician assistant is employed.

b. Registered Nurses, Nurse Anesthetists, Physician Assistants, and Expanded-Function Dental Auxiliaries

(1) An advancement of one step, not to exceed the maximum of the grade, may be granted at any appropriate time within any period of 52 weeks.

(2) The advancement shall not be regarded as an equivalent increase or in lieu of a periodic step increase.

(3) No more than one such advancement may be granted within any single 52-week period.

c. **Hybrids.** Employees in occupations identified in 38 U.S.C. 7401(3) are eligible for one-step special advancements for performance, subject to meeting the criteria for QSIs.

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8. CRITERIA FOR CASH AWARDS FOR FULL-TIME, PART-TIME, AND INTERMITTENT REGISTERED NURSES AND NURSE ANESTHETISTS APPOINTED UNDER 38 U.S.C. 7306, 7401(1) AND 7405

a. **General.** Cash awards under this paragraph are in addition to special advancements mentioned previously in this chapter. A registered nurse or nurse anesthetist may not receive a Special Advancement for Performance and a Special Contribution Award based on the same performance, nor may they receive a Special Advancement for Achievement and a Special Contribution Award based on the same achievement or contribution. However, when it is determined appropriate, a registered nurse or nurse anesthetist may be granted a Special Advancement for Performance or Achievement and a cash award for exemplary job performance and exemplary job achievement as outlined in paragraph c below.

b. **Specialty Certification.** Specialty certification is a mechanism for recognizing employees who have been certified by the appropriate national certifying body. For this paragraph, specialty certification includes second and subsequent certifications, but does not include recertification or renewal of previously held certifications. Certification also includes advanced certification, provided the requirements for advanced certification are clearly in addition to basic certification.

(1) **Cash Awards.** The Director or designee must grant a cash award of up to \$2,000 to covered employees who become certified while on VA rolls in a specialty related to the accomplishment of VA's health care mission.

(2) **Establishment of Written Policy Concerning Cash Awards for Specialty Certification**

(a) Responsibilities:

1. Facility directors shall establish written policies for granting cash awards for certification.